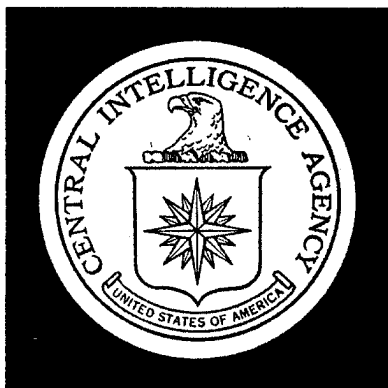


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DIRECTORATE OF
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DATE: DEC 2002

Intelligence Memorandum

*The Reaction of the North Vietnamese to the
Stepped Up Air Attacks*

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23 May 1967
No. 0647/67

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
23 May 1967

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INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

The Reaction of the North Vietnamese to the
Stepped-up Air Attacks

Summary

The determination and steadfastness of the people in North Vietnam affected by the step-up in bombing is still strong, despite the fact that their physical livelihood has become more difficult. Evacuation from the Hanoi-Haiphong area has been spurred by the bombings, thus increasing the separation of families and the inadequacy of housing. Food is also more scarce, although still adequate. Almost all the recent reports from eyewitness observers, nonetheless, state that morale is still sound, and the people purposeful and obedient to the regime.

The government and the party show no sign of undue concern over morale, although propagandistic efforts to maintain popular resolution are a regular and important facet of Communist activities. There is every sign of continued strong determination among the North Vietnamese leaders themselves. Their statements, both in public and in private, exude confidence. They appear fully willing to sustain an even heavier level of damage and casualties in order to prolong the war.

The resiliency displayed by the average North Vietnamese in the face of the air attacks stems both from his traditions and his psychological makeup. He is fiercely proud of an ancient heritage of successful resistance against all invaders of the Vietnamese homeland. The evidence indicates that much of the populace believe the raids foreshadow a new invasion of their country. Thus,

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they see themselves defending their homes and families against an aggressor--the attitude most likely to bring out the greatest degree of courage and endurance.

Psychologically, the North Vietnamese populace is very tough. It is used to hunger, to an absence of personal amenities, and to wearisome regimentation as a daily fact of life in peace and war. Since it is an "insulated" group, it tends to react literally to developments. The appearance of attacking planes over North Vietnam, therefore, allows the people clearly to discern and define the enemy described in Communist propaganda. Hostility over the bomb damage is turned toward the attacker and not toward the authorities.

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The Physical Effects of the Stepped-Up Bombing

1. Life in the Hanoi and Haiphong areas has clearly become increasingly grim over the past several months as a result of the stepped-up US air strikes. The destruction of North Vietnam's few textile plants has limited the availability of clothing material and observers have recently noted that the clothes worn by the people of Hanoi are now more patched and worn looking. Rice is strictly rationed and the prices of certain supplementary foods have risen markedly.

2. Food, however, appears to be adequate, with substitutes available for the staple diet of rice.

[redacted] in Hanoi reported on 11 May 1967 that lower level government cadre and people with no official status received 25 percent of the May rice ration in flour. Even so, [redacted] report stated, Hanoi appears to be better off than the provinces.

3. The stepped-up air strikes have also made travel within North Vietnam very difficult. Letters written to relatives abroad by people who have evacuated urban centers note the difficulty in traveling between the cities--where many still work--and the relocation centers, where their children have been settled. Nevertheless, traffic continues to move and the people appear to take great pride in their ability to offset the effects of the bombing by such innovations as pontoon bridges.

4. The air strikes have also limited the amount of gasoline available for civilian use. [redacted]

[redacted] has reported on several occasions that there is no gasoline at the civilian depot. The citizens of North Vietnam have managed, however, to get along with only limited amounts of gasoline. They travel mostly by foot or bicycle. A recent visitor to Hanoi noted that the DRV Foreign Minister commutes to work each day by bicycle.

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5. One of the major effects of the bombings on the people of the Hanoi-Haiphong area has been to increase evacuation to the countryside. Prior to the latest round of air strikes in the Hanoi area beginning in late April, it was estimated that about 30 percent of the population of that city had been evacuated. An additional 30 percent is now slated for dispersal to the outlying areas. Evacuation has caused considerable difficulties for the people because the regime seems to have done little to prepare the relocation centers. The people were left on their own to build shelters at their new homes, food distribution reportedly was poor, at least at first, and local officials were provided inadequate direction from Hanoi on how to handle the sudden influx.

6. An example of the difficulties encountered by the evacuees was provided by the wife of a trade delegation official who wrote several letters to her husband in December 1966.

"Yesterday, I went to the country for a day and did labor for the children. I dug a shelter trench for them. I worked from 0730 to 1100 hours just carrying dirt."

"It is now really miserable in the country. There is no rain water and the river has dried up. As a result, it is necessary to bathe and wash clothes with pond water which is really filthy."

7. Many of these people, however, appear to adjust to their situation. The woman quoted above, for example, later wrote her husband saying: "I just came back from the country and the children are all fine. The shelter is now completed and the children are on vacation from school." The only action taken by those who do not adjust to evacuation is to drift back into Hanoi. In many cases this appears to be the result of their inability to obtain work in the countryside. There is no evidence that these people offer any active opposition to the regime. The government does not punish people

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caught returning to the city, but, by strictly rationing rice and honoring ration cards only in certain specified areas, it encourages people to stay in the relocation centers.

The Attitude of the People

8. Constant readings are taken by the diplomatic community in Hanoi on the attitude of the populace around them, and every visitor who passes through makes an effort to sound out not only the officials but the people on the streets. The general consensus of these sources is that morale, stated in terms of discipline, confidence, and willingness to endure hardship, remains good.

9. [redacted]

[redacted] in Hanoi took a consensus reading of the diplomatic community as of 1 March 1967 on a variety of subjects including the effect of the bombing on popular morale. The consensus was that the people of Hanoi were adequately fed, reasonably clothed and showed no evidence of suffering excessive hardship. [redacted] who delivered medicine and drugs to North Vietnam in March 1967, found the morale of the people "high;" those he met, he said, openly declared their resolve to endure.

10. The reports of other observers support this. [redacted] just back from Hanoi in mid-March stated that the people and soldiers on the streets of Hanoi appeared "clean, proper, and purposeful." [redacted] who visited Hanoi in late April reports that conditions in that city were austere but "morale was high among the population." He stated that he encountered "no sign of softness or desire to give in."

Weariness

11. The cumulative effect of the air strikes in the Hanoi area, however, may have produced a certain weariness on the part of the population. [redacted] states that there were 19 separate air raids in the vicinity of Hanoi during his eight days there. A member of the [redacted] in Hanoi said in early May that the constant

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air attacks were making it difficult for the air raid wardens to control the people. [redacted]

[redacted] in Hanoi commented on 2 May that the population obeys air raid warnings, but that during the latest raids the people proceeded to their one-man shelters and did not get into them. He speculated that the hot weather was responsible for this development. He also noted that there seemed to have been a slight slackening of response on the part of the people to the alerts. This may be due in part to weariness, but it may also be attributed to a growing confidence on the part of the people in their own ability to judge when it is necessary to take cover and when it is safe to remain in the open.

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Morale of the Leadership

12. Those few members of the North Vietnamese leadership who regularly make themselves available to visitors are maintaining an air of confidence and resolution. The leading spokesman for the Hanoi regime is Premier Pham Van Dong. His recent statements indicate that he remains firmly convinced that the Communists will outlast the US. On 28 April, for example, [redacted] told Premier Dong of Ambassador Lodge's comment to the effect that Hanoi would have been in a better bargaining position six months ago than it was now and that it could be in a worse position six months from now. The DRV Premier replied that, on the contrary, the Communists would be in a stronger position in six months. Conditions in North Vietnam, he stated, are considerably better now, despite the bombings, than they were during the war against the French.

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13. Pham Van Dong made a similar statement to a Tunisian visitor in early April, declaring that after another six months of intensive fighting, during which North Vietnam is prepared to accept its losses, the US Government will become discouraged and will give in to mounting antiwar sentiment in the US. It is doubtful, however, that the North Vietnamese leaders believe that the US Government will be forced by popular sentiment to abandon the war after another six months. [redacted]

who recently

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visited Hanoi, stated that the North Vietnamese leaders have a realistic view of the effect of the antiwar sentiment in the US and do not place too much stock in its short-term results. There is little doubt, however, that the North Vietnamese believe that sooner or later antiwar feeling in the US will force a drastic modification in US policy.

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14. In the meantime, the DRV leaders appear willing to absorb an even heavier level of damage and casualties in order to prolong the war. Pham Van Dong told the [redacted] that the "US policy of escalation" will not work. He declared that his people would "fight to the end" and that he himself would "take up a rifle" to fight the US.

15. Ho Chi Minh and his top lieutenants are battle-hardened revolutionaries who fought and defeated the French. They are convinced that their success was due in large measure to the fact that they correctly interpreted and properly applied Communist ideology to the situation in Vietnam. Influencing their determination is a strong spirit of nationalism, which finds its expression in bitter anti-Americanism. Ho and his aides are thoroughly convinced that the US deliberately set out to undermine the 1954 Geneva agreements and the provision therein for national elections in Vietnam in July 1956. The hierarchy of the Vietnam Workers Party remains convinced that, had those elections been held, Vietnam today would be united under a government headed by Ho Chi Minh and the Vietnam Workers Party.

16. They believe that they were fully justified during the mid-fifties in turning to the use of force in order to overthrow Diem and unify the country after Diem repeatedly rebuffed North Vietnamese offers to hold meetings preparatory to national elections. They do not see themselves as aggressors attempting to seize control of a neighbor nation but rather as the legitimate authorities of a national government denied control over half their country by a foreign invader. The initiation of US air strikes against North Vietnam in February 1965 and the introduction of US combat forces into South

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Vietnam in 1965 further inflamed the Hanoi leaders' feelings and reinforced their view that the US was bent on denying them their rightful place at the head of a unified Vietnam.

Factors Underlying the Popular Will

17. The resiliency displayed by the average North Vietnamese resident in the face of the air attacks stems both from his traditions and from his psychological makeup. The North Vietnamese, especially the Tonkinese or people of the Red River delta, are fiercely proud of their ancient tradition of successfully resisting and overcoming all the invaders of their homeland. Much of their folklore is devoted to tales of the deeds of their ancestors in driving out the Chinese who held Vietnam from the 10th through the 12th centuries, or in defeating the forays of the brutal Mongol armies in the 13th century.

18. The Communist regime has assiduously promoted the idea that the defeat of the French in 1954 was the culmination of a century of steady struggle against an external aggressor. It is clear that the Communist authorities fully recognize the value of the North Vietnamese traditions of resistance to the outsider and play on them constantly in their extensive propaganda efforts to maintain morale.

19. For all practical purposes, the view of the average Vietnamese toward the current war is totally dominated by the Hanoi authorities. A majority of the evidence indicates that the populace believes the air attacks are the prelude to another invasion and effort to occupy the country--just as Hanoi tells them. The populace thus sees itself defending home and family against an aggressor--an attitude most likely to spur the greatest amount of courage and endurance.

20. As a whole, moreover, the populace is not significantly vulnerable to the argument that North Vietnam is being punished for its support of the war in South Vietnam, since it generally believes the regime's line that the people of the South are also

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EO 12958 3.4(b) (1) fighting for independence against the same enemy.
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21. Psychologically, the North Vietnamese are a tough people. Personal hardship has been a daily fact of life for them in peace and war. They are used to hunger, to an absence of personal amenities, to separation from family, and to wearisome regimentation. Most of the populace over the age of 15 is almost certainly inured to the sights and sounds of military conflict around them, since they were on the scene, or participated in the war against France, which ranged widely over North Vietnam. Moreover, the air attacks against much of North Vietnam have now been under way for over two years, and thus have become, in a sense, a "routine" irritant.

many individuals are more callous toward the raids now than they were two years ago.

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22. The North Vietnamese are an "insulated" people in the terminology of the psychologists. They are largely without the experience of individual freedom in the Western tradition. Mass regimentation provides security for them and permits them a sense of inner freedom. It does not evoke hostility, since they interpret it as an indication of the concern of the authorities for their welfare. This has several important effects with respect to the air raids. In the first place, the military and civil activities of the authorities in reaction to the attack are especially well received, even if they involve trying, dangerous, and tiring participation on the part of the individual.

23. Secondly, since the populace is an insulated group, it tends to react literally to developments around it. Regime propaganda, therefore, which attempts to stir up hatred, hostility, and resistance against the attackers is effectively reinforced by the actual appearance of the attacking planes over North Vietnam. Hostility over the bomb damage is turned toward the attacker, and not toward the regime. The ability of the people clearly to discern and define the enemy described in Communist propaganda probably tends to cause an upsurge in dedication.

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